



# ANALYZING TEENAGERS' FASCINATION WITH CRIMINAL CHARACTERS' BEHAVIOR THROUGH SOCIAL NETWORKS AND FICTIONAL NARRATIVE

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## ABSTRACT

Over the years, social networks have increased globalization worldwide. This has led to more information being disseminated and reaching more people. It was found that contemporary society largely focuses on criminal behavior and the individuals who commit such acts, reflecting a preoccupation with understanding the motivations and implications of crime. Additionally, certain figures captivate teenagers by reflecting on their challenges and aspirations. The themes of rebellion and identity exploration resonate, inspiring adolescent admiration and emulation. Moreover, social networks serve as platforms for communication, and literature—especially fictional stories—plays a similar role. Thus, teenagers are fascinated by the behavior and actions of criminal characters due to the increasing popularity of these social networks and the misinformation they carry. Lastly, fictional stories are often based on real events, shaping how we view criminals and their actions, and this can lead teenagers to change their ideas about what is good or bad.

**KEYWORDS:** Social Network, Globalization, Fictional Narrative, Teenagers, Information Dissemination

## INTRODUCTION

The study of how criminal characters' behaviors and actions have fascinated psychological manners in adolescents is due to the globalization of the use of social networks and even fictional narratives. This causes them to be drawn to a dangerous flame, captivated by its glow, without realizing the harm it can cause. This tendency didn't start recently; for example, between 1925 and 1930, the Prohibition Era began in the United States. At this time, criminal gangsters and business figures such as Al Capone emerged. When he was arrested, many stories surfaced about his glamorous life, which captured the public eye, especially adolescents. So, why do teenagers feel fascinated by the behaviors and actions of criminal characters in fictional narratives and social networks, while some teenagers feel horror and discomfort about it?

Recently, psychologists have realized that what makes a criminal character so fascinating is their great popularity. "The rise of true crime series and documentaries has brought these criminals into focus, mainly on big platforms such as Netflix," as stated by the C magazine of California. Teenagers are fascinated by observing the behavior and actions committed by these criminals. Since, due to their growing popularity, they have an effect on what they consume in their daily lives. The world has been globalized in many aspects. Any information can be misinformed, and this causes great popularity among criminals for their acts and behaviors. Just as they gain popularity with this type of content, social networks can quickly spread false information, create erroneous content, and exaggerate the commonness and depth of different behaviors and actions. "Albert Bandura developed a social learning theory, highlighting how individuals learn their behaviors by observing others and the consequences of their actions (1977, p7)." This makes teenagers question their perspective on what is good or bad,

the consequences it will imply, and if their actions are suitable. Teenagers are fascinated by criminal characters, behaviors, and actions due to social networks increasing popularity, globalization, and the misinformation they have. The fictional narrative is also based on real stories, encompassing how we see criminals and the crimes they commit, allowing teens to change their perspective on what is good or bad. Lastly, humans are very curious to know the darkest aspects of humanity. Of course, social networks and fictional narratives have affected teens along the way. Cause them a change in their perspective and bad influences on their behaviors, and every act committed has consequences sooner or later.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In modern times, we see how young people (especially teenagers) currently spend a lot of time on social networks, making them subjects of interest for different service providers, being vulnerable to a certain extent. According to Dr. Rossana Reguillo Cruz, it makes them instruments of consumption, and among this type of content, we find products full of violence. Social networks, being globalized media, offer a series of ideas to young people from all countries but are subject to the cultural impact of each country. Just like these, they put them in contact with violence since they exist in our society like the one is created in an imaginary way. Professor Omar Rincon and Jorge Bonilla, both famous writers, contributed to the idea that two types of violence usually take place on social networks or on television—which are the most present genres—being narrative genres (fictional narrative) and formats of television that are associated with entertainment (Rincon & Bonilla, 1988, p. 6).

According to Norwegian sociologist and mathematician Johan Galtung, violence is represented in a triangle made up of direct,

structural, and cultural violence. The study mainly focuses on the analysis of cultural violence. Cultural or symbolic violence is based on aspects of culture that can be used to justify direct or structural violence and thus become acceptable in society. (Galtung, 1996; 2003). Galtung refers to the fact that culture is constant and remains basically unchanged for long periods since it depends on the speed of cultural transformations (2016; 2003). In this case, we refer to young people and how, although consequences are not immediately noticeable, they will eventually detonate. They create these habits of fascination with the behaviors and actions of criminals and the crimes they commit. Discuss these aspects below in a little more depth and their impact on young people.

## METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research was used for this study to gather and analyze non-numerical data in order to understand individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and motivations. The choices made for collecting and gathering data based on this approach allow the organization of information based on the priority of what is most relevant. For example, the main topic of discussion is teenagers and how the behaviors and actions of criminal characters influence them through social networks and fictional narratives. Based on this, divide the impact and consequences that social networks have on them. Social networks' popularization, misinformation, and globalization have caused young people today to ingest socially unacceptable ideas or information. More so, fictional narratives are explained as part of research, since most young people today read about crime; they often do not know these stories are based on crimes committed in real life. Finally, the study focused on teenagers—and how some of them feel fascination while others feel discomfort—and their way of perceiving what is good or bad. The methods used allow better comprehension, understanding, and development of this paper.

## Social Network Popularity, Globalization, and Misinformation

The increase in the popularity of social networks has influenced several societal issues, one of them being crimes. When referring to Social networks, we not only refer to the most popular ones like Instagram, TikTok, or Facebook but also to news like CNN and other large platforms like Netflix, Hulu, YouTube, etc. This has been going on for a long time, since the rise of the Internet in the 1990s. Discussion forums and true crime websites began to emerge. Allowing enthusiasts from around the world to discuss famous and unknown criminals. The growth in the production of documentaries and true crime series, such as "Making a Murderer" (2015) and "Mindhunter" (2017), captured global attention and led to massive discussions on social media. In 2023, the popularity of criminals on social networks has increased significantly.

A propensity for notable documentaries and true crime series sometimes makes criminals look glamorous and notable. The Netflix series "Dahmer" generated numerous debates online, C magazine affirmed, which caused a lot of controversy because many people began to defend criminal behavior and actions. The actor who performed the role was attractive, and many justified his actions. He committed atrocities, killing 17 people,

all of whom were minors. We know this type of series is only to inform us about what types of people really exist in the world, and we should not be careless. This also influences a lot because the majority of the audience watching these types of programs are teenagers. Moreover, news can cause people to be misinformed, like focusing on people who report criminal cases incorrectly, spreading false testimonies of victims, and causing much harm. This can also happen with famous YouTube influencers who are dedicated to informing others. For example, Dinosaur Vlogs is a famous YouTube channel based on reporting about famous criminals and serial killers, their actions, facts, and stories. However, spreading wrong information or half-truths may later make it difficult to believe what is true. Especially if it is for a young audience, such as teenagers, this could cause great psychological damage. Our source of information and knowledge is the internet, and it is necessary to know how to differentiate between reliable and unreliable sources.

## Fictional Narrative Real Story Cases

Nowadays, more real-life stories are used to create fictional stories. A very recognized story writer called Margot Harrison talked in an interview about her recent book, published in 2023, that went viral. She mainly focused her writings on true crime stories. Her book called "Only She Came Back" was inspired by a real crime that happened in 2021—the murder of Gabby Petito. The interviewer asked her an interesting question: society's fascination with true crime has continuously grown, and what effects continue drawing people's attention to it? She answers the following: "We usually tend to be fascinated with things and people who live outside the rules our society implies; criminals and murderers fit very well in this. When true crimes try to glamorize these actions, it can be very uncomfortable." True crime has always inspired fiction but it's never just a fictional way in which we can embroider facts that have occurred. It is a way in which shocking events make us look at human life in different ways and new stories are created and thus writers can be inspired. For example, in Gawker's 2021 essay, author Emma Berquist explained that "True Crime Is Rotting Our Brains (2021)." It clogs our minds and causes conflicts in people's principles and values. Of course, this is not always the case; famous writers of this genre have created great reputations and increased their stories' popularity. For example, Truman Capote ("In Cold Blood" 1966), Erick Larsson ("The Devil in the White City" 2003) and so many more. As Dr. Andrea Roth stated, "true crimes have made people think that if they are either good or bad, or they are born this way, and they are only bad seeds it is just a matter of finding who they are. This can affect their trust in people and cause them distrust." Consequently, this has greatly influenced people, especially teenagers, who are the most interested in these topics. In developing trust issues, questioning their personality and who they are, distrusting others and their own actions.

## Teenagers' Fascination vs Teenagers' Discomfort

There are many factors for why some teenagers are fascinated by this type of content while others feel discomfort and fear. This can be attributed to many social, environmental, and psychological factors. Psychological factors can be the seeking

of curiosity because teenagers are always looking for ways to feel stimulus for a desire of excitement. Having a feeling of empathy towards the criminal's background story, their life, and everything they went through. Social factors can be their peer influence and social network effect. Peer influence refers to the type of people they are around. Since they are interested in the topic, both will find it interesting. Social networks have been a key factor for almost everything nowadays due to globalization and the increase in popularity of these criminal actions. Environmental factors, especially the family environment, also play an important role since it has been observed that what we learn at home is what we reflect on the world; hence the saying "the first education begins at home." What happens if there is no good education and the family environment is quite violent and dangerous? It begins to be normalized. Children do not differentiate what's good or bad, and that leads to bigger consequences that sooner or later arrive.

Teenagers who feel discomfort by observing this type of content often feel great empathy from the victim's side and understand the feeling the family is going through; they feel more impotence and resentment towards criminals. Recent studies have proven higher levels of empathy are associated with greater emotional reactions to others' distress; this can lead to discomfort in encountering criminal behavior. Teenagers also suffer from anxiety, some more than others. Usually, they are very sensitive, especially to the type of content they are exposed to. They don't know how to handle it, and it usually causes them discomfort. As a result, teenagers can react in different ways when dealing with this topic.

## DISCUSSION

This paper focuses on discussing two main ideas that surround the research question. One of these ideas is social networking, which is divided into subtopics like popularity, misinformation, and of course globalization. This paper attempts to explain causes like trust issues, reliable sources, and several other factors. The second main point of discussion is the fictional narrative, which has a greater impact since children consume more about reading novels about the genre of true crime. As Johan Galtung explains, a triangle has three sides; they represent the three types of violence, and the violence that teenagers are more exposed to is cultural violence, as referred to in the literature review. Protecting teenagers and how things they do have consequences can greatly help in changing their perspective and making them grow as good citizens.

## CONCLUSION

Ultimately, although many reasons are suggested, we can conclude that teenagers being stimulated and learning negative things can have great consequences since their fascination with criminal characters and their behaviors and actions are due to several factors. One of the main factors is the use of social networks, globalization, and misinformation. Literature and real cases have inspired stories; they create the genre of true crime for fictional narratives. Also, the contrast in which some teenagers feel fascination while others feel discomfort highlights the help our youth need guidance and support by necessities established.

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